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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VARIOUS ACTIVITIES AND CAMPAIGNS BEING HELD IN RECOGNITION OF MAY  
AS NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH MONTH**

MONTGOMERY – For more than 50 years, National Mental Health Month has been observed in May. This year's campaign to "Mind Your Health: Get Connected," from Mental Health America, which takes a lead role in sponsoring activities and events during the month, serves to raise awareness about mental illnesses and the importance of mental wellness for all. The 2008 theme is focused on social connectedness, and its importance in maintaining good mental health.

In Alabama, the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation is encouraging the celebration of mental health month along with Mental Health America. The department serves more than 100,000 people per year with mental illnesses through community contract providers and around 4,000 people per year in state psychiatric hospitals. The U.S. Surgeon General has said that one in five Americans will experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

Commissioner John Houston of the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation says, "Mental illnesses are biological brain disorders that are highly treatable with modern medication and care. The stigma, wrongly associated with these illnesses, often prevents people from seeking treatment in the early stages of the illness. When people realize that these symptoms are biologically and psychologically based and that they are not 'failures in character,' they are more likely to go to the doctor before a crisis occurs."

The department has partnered with NAMI Alabama to produce a series of television commercials which will start airing mid-May that will deliver the same message, that mental illness is a biological illness and that people with mental illnesses should receive the same respect afforded individuals with other illnesses. The theme of the spots is "Labels are for boxes...not people." The spots will air statewide mid-May through July.

Elsewhere in the state, Mental Health America in Montgomery is hosting its Spring Education Workshop that shares its title with the theme of Mental Health Awareness Month, "Mind Your Health: Get Connected." This event will feature four renowned speakers, including Dr. Patrice Harris from Emory University. Continuing education credits are being provided to attendees through the department.

Finally, the Governor recently signed a proclamation declaring May 1-May 8 as Children's Mental Health Week. Community mental health facilities are encouraged to sponsor events and hold activities during this week to promote awareness related to child and adolescent mental health.

**RESOURCES**

For more information about Mental Health Month in Alabama contact Wanda Laird, Executive Director of Mental Health America in Montgomery at (334) 262-5500, or John Ziegler, Public Information Officer of the Alabama Department of Mental Health & Mental Retardation at (334) 242-3417.

Information about mental health services in the state of Alabama can be obtained by contacting the Department of Mental Health & Mental Retardation's Public Information Office, or visit us online at [www.mh.alabama.gov](http://www.mh.alabama.gov).

For more information on Mental Health America, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/may).

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